

Statement of Carl C. Risch
Nominee to be Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs
Submitted to the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
July 18, 2017

Chairman Corker, Ranking Member Cardin, members of the Committee, I am honored to appear before you as the President's nominee to be Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs.

I am joined today by my family: my wife of over 22 years, Wendy Taylor Risch, who has supported me throughout my career and accompanied me on three overseas assignments. Wendy also worked for the Department of State as a spousal employee during two of my overseas tours. I am also joined by our daughters, Anneke Risch, a rising 8th grader, and Ilse Risch, a rising 6th grader. My family is the center of my life, and instilling in our children a sense of kindness and empathy, as well as a respect for public service, is a priority for us. In the past five years, my daughters have lived in three different countries and, thus, have attended three different schools, all due to my service to the government. I'm in awe at their resilience and positive attitudes, and we are both very proud of them.

I am grateful to the President and Secretary Tillerson for the confidence and trust they have placed in me. It is, without a doubt, the greatest honor of my professional life to be nominated, and, if confirmed, I will devote myself to serving the American people in this important capacity within the Department of State.

My wife and I are both natives of central Pennsylvania, where we were born, raised, and educated. I practiced law there for eight years, first as an associate attorney and later as a partner in a law firm. My father, a veteran of the Korean War, worked for 30 years at a factory, now closed, which made automotive parts. My mother stayed home with me after my adoption. I had a stable and happy childhood, and my parents encouraged my lifelong interest in – my passion for – international travel and public service. Being an adopted person, I have also felt a special kinship with the abandoned, the orphaned, and the forgotten, and this kinship has influenced me throughout my life. For example, over the past nine years, I have volunteered to serve on refugee processing trips for my agency in Thailand, Pakistan, Namibia, and Malaysia, where I worked toward the resettlement to the United States of hundreds of victims of persecution and torture, so that they could start new lives. My family and I have also served as cultural orientation volunteers for refugees already resettled in the United States.

As an attorney and career civil servant, I will bring to the Bureau of Consular Affairs the same values and principles that have guided my career for the past 22 years – a commitment to the rule of law, to efficiency, to justice, and to transparency. My entire career has been focused on serving the public, especially U.S. citizens living and working abroad, and to the equal and fair application of the law. I began my government service as a Foreign Service Officer in 1999, after four years of private practice as an attorney. Choosing the consular cone was an obvious and easy choice for a young man entering the Foreign Service with an interest in immigration law. My consular tour was one of the most professionally enriching and rewarding experiences of my life, and leaving the Foreign Service to return to private practice and to start a family in Pennsylvania was a difficult career decision. Nevertheless, I am grateful and honored to have

had the opportunity to work with the dedicated men and women of the State Department, especially in the days and weeks after the attacks of 9/11, an experience that has profoundly affected me personally and professionally.

In 2006, I returned to public service as a civil servant with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services. It is at USCIS where I expanded my knowledge of immigration and nationality law, as well as learned to manage adjudicatory systems and backlog reduction efforts. I rose through the ranks at USCIS, first as an appeals official, then as a manager, and finally as Chief of Staff. In 2013, my wife and I made the decision to return to international service, and I have spent the past four years serving USCIS in our embassies in the Philippines and in Korea, most recently as my agency's director in Seoul. During those years, I had the pleasure of working side-by-side with consular sections throughout the world, from Fiji to Namibia, to address thorny questions of law, policy, and process involving our shared mission of facilitating travel and lawful immigration to the United States. While abroad, I also had the honor of serving the interests of U.S. citizens living and working overseas, especially the men and women serving in the military. Assisting military families with lawful immigration was a highlight of my career, but my greatest honor was administering the oath of allegiance to hundreds of military members and spouses at dozens of overseas naturalization ceremonies. When I was asked by our career Acting Director to serve as Chief of Staff of USCIS, I was honored and immediately put in motion my family's early return to the United States. I remain a dedicated civil servant to this day.

If confirmed, it will be a privilege of a lifetime to serve again in the Department of State and lead the fine men and women of the Bureau of Consular Affairs. Consular officers are a first line of defense in our efforts to protect our country from those who will do us harm, and they are among the hardest working, most dedicated, and bravest employees in government service. They often work in dangerous places, under challenging conditions, all to serve the American people and advance the interests of the United States. Many of those who work with us abroad are foreign nationals, lending their expertise in pursuit of our goals. Domestically, Consular Affairs' employees thoughtfully and promptly adjudicate millions of passports, work with colleagues at USCIS to process immigrant visa documents, and support the Bureau's global enterprise. Together, these talented professionals are responsible for advancing one of the Department of State's core responsibilities: protecting the lives and interests of U.S. citizens. The Bureau of Consular Affairs is committed to crisis management and response, assisting individual U.S. citizens who are imprisoned, injured, or in distress, and working with grieving family members when tragedy strikes. This work is both complex and emotionally taxing, and I am immensely proud to say that I was once one of them, even for a short period of time. If confirmed, I look forward to leading this critical organization in continuing to succeed in its important mission.

Since my days as a consular officer, so much has changed for the better at the State Department and the Bureau of Consular Affairs has proved to be a center of innovation and leadership. An impressive array of interagency security review processes, continuous vetting of visa applicants using updated technology, biometrics collection, an improved training program, a serious commitment to fraud prevention, close cooperation with the Department of Homeland Security, and a culture of making national security a number one priority, has strengthened State's shared mission to protect our homeland. As my predecessor, former Assistant Secretary Michele Bond stated in her testimony before this committee two years ago, "every visa decision we make,

thousands of times a day, is a national security decision.” If confirmed, I will strive to make sure consular professionals continue to have the training, resources, and leadership necessary to fulfill their duties in accordance with the laws of the United States, while augmenting our national security and facilitating legitimate international travel. As I have noted, CA’s number one priority is the safety and protection of U.S. citizens overseas, and, if confirmed, I will make this my number one priority as well.

Should I be confirmed, I commit to working with members of this Committee and to being responsive to your questions and concerns. Thank you for your time and I look forward to your questions.